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‘Still Game’: An analysis of the life history and career disappointments of one veteran male teacher of physical education in Scotland.

Abstract

Relatively little is known about veteran teachers’ professional lives and especially of veteran teachers who have failed to secure promoted teaching positions. This is a weakness in our understanding of teachers’ lives given the social and policy changes which have taken place in teaching over recent decades. Through a series of ten semi-structured interviews, this paper examines the life history of one veteran male teacher of physical education in Scotland who has taught for nearly four decades in the same school. Findings revealed that ‘Jack’s’ resilience, solace in subject teaching and sense of vocational identity was helpful in coping with lack of promotion and a deteriorating school and community environment. However, diminishing professional development opportunities, a reduction in communities of physical educationalists working together, combined with limited collaborative managerial cultures in school led to the later parts of Jack’s career being isolated and disconnected in comparison with earlier years.

Life history Professionalism Careers

‘Still Game’: An analysis of the life history and career disappointments of one veteran male teacher of physical education in Scotland.

Introduction

Relatively little remains known about how veteran teachers’ careers unfold and how they sustain their teaching (Cohen, 2009). Yet such teachers, defined in Cohen’s (2009) terms as those with more than twenty-five years teaching experience, are very often integral to the efficient running of schools; experienced and valued colleagues in a teaching force continually having to consider change agendas. Thus, analysing the life history of veteran teachers and the factors which have encouraged or frustrated them during their years in teaching requires greater review if the influences upon their professional lives are to be better understood. Specifically, in the context of physical education, Armour & Jones (1998, p. 123) highlighted over a decade ago two particularly intriguing associated points: namely that while there is ‘relatively little literature on physical education teachers and their careers’, it is likely that ‘career satisfaction is rarely achieved’. Since then little further research has investigated the dilemmas posed by these statements; a disappointing omission given the acknowledged importance of teacher morale and sense of being valued within general definitions of high level professionalism (Sachs, 2003).

Thus, while there have been many insightful studies of teachers’ lives (Lortie, 1975; Huberman, 1993) research which additionally includes a precise focus on the particular effects of career progression (or more precisely in this paper lack of career progression) as a component of career satisfaction are far less evident. For example, in Hextall et al., (2007) annotated bibliography of over one hundred texts on teachers’ lives and professional practice since 2000, the predominant focus is on professionalism and professional development (especially on studies involving teachers in the early stages of their careers). There is much less research on the tensions associated with teaching for many years and of how lack of desired career progression impacts on teachers’ identity. As ‘identity’ is at the core of factors which affects motivation, effectiveness and perceptions of self-

efficacy (Day et al., 2006), researching the factors which influence how teachers construct their professional identity necessitates including teachers views from across a range of ages and circumstance. Pursuing enquiry in this way assists in reducing the prospects of veteran teachers becoming marginalised and ‘silenced voices’ (O’Sullivan, 2006, p. 267). This is an important matter for under the largely patronage-based model of policy development which is favoured in many countries (Poppleton & Williamson, 2004) the tendency is for the policy process to take account of the relatively privileged views of promoted teachers. Thus, it is their contribution which is most commonly recognised in stakeholder groups and in subsequent planning networks charged with providing guidelines and advice for new teaching interventions at school, unitary authority and national level. This is despite such teachers experiences of teaching often being considerably less than those of many veteran teachers.

With some expectation of describing the career of one relatively marginalised teaching voice, this paper reports on the life history and career disappointments of one veteran male physical education teacher in Scotland; a teacher who has repeatedly been unsuccessful in securing a subject-based Head of Department (HoD) position and who has taught in the same school continuously for nearly four decades. Research involved a sequenced series of ten semi-structured interviews which focussed on the social and policy context of one teachers’ life and the influences and consequences there were for their identity and professional practice. In selecting this focus, it is recognised that for many teachers ‘it is the subject which becomes the lynchpin of identity’ (Bernstein, 1971, p. 56). Accordingly, analysis takes due account of times at which subject teaching is particularly important. However, the paper tries to avoid becoming overly bound up and narrowly drawn towards subject specific matters, as this would necessarily be less pertinent for a wider professional readership.

The social and policy contexts of teaching

Cohen (2009) reminds us that most prior theorizing on veteran teachers has focused on teachers reasons for leaving the profession rather than reasons for persevering in the profession. That which does exist (e.g. Xin et al., 1999) tends to be relatively 'broad and predictable' (Cohen, 2009, p. 474): the importance of intrinsic satisfaction in teaching; of being valued by school leaders and the benefits of collegial working arrangements typifying generalized findings. However, more recently a body of literature has begun to theorize on the importance of 'hardiness' (Matti, 2002, p. 72) as a dispositional factor which Cohen (2009) considers might be productive to include in analysis of veteran teacher as hardiness is characterized by high levels of commitment, a sense of control over environments and of being comfortable with challenges.

The extent to which veteran teachers are committed and in control of their professional lives could be influenced by their position in the teaching hierarchy. This might be an issue of some importance in Scotland where the 'unusual emphasis on hierarchy' (Gatherer, 2008, p. 900) could well impact on the practice of education and on career pathways and professional identity of many teachers. Leadership positions can be empowering for some teachers, as schools require a form of executive management control e.g. in the form of HoDs and a Senior Management team (SMT) in order to emphasise their commitment towards efficiency and productivity. By contrast, teachers who aspire towards but fail to secure additional managerial responsibilities might consider their careers to be stagnating. For as Humes (1986, p. 22) notes in a Scottish context, completing your professional remit through exclusively teaching (rather than combining teaching with additional managerial and/or pastoral responsibilities) represents a 'modest rung on the ladder of career advancement'.

Furthermore, failure to secure promotion is a public as well as private matter, as colleagues tend to be aware of the details and outcomes of the competitive HoD interview process.

Kelchtermans (1996) found that such personal investment in teaching left teachers vulnerable to the

judgements of colleagues and as vulnerability increased teaching became characterised by conforming rather than questioning existing management arrangements. For some teachers this has involved wrestling with the contradictions and disappointments which exist between their personal investment in teaching and the regimes of education management practices which they operate within. Often such arrangements can 'be immensely stressful and damaging' and lead to variations in commitment and control over teaching environments (Ball, 2005, p. 9). Furthermore, Day (2008, p. 253) found that it was veteran secondary school teachers in areas of socio-economic deprivation who were most likely to become 'at greater risk of sooner or later losing their motivation and commitment to their work'. However, even in areas of low socio-economic status, the tendency is for many teachers to teach for many years. Therefore, how in these circumstances, teachers are able to map out a professional life which attempts to sustain their motivation and commitment is worthy of enquiry, as for male teachers 'there is a heavy social expectation that men will work from the point at which they leave full-time education to their retirement' (Riddell, et al., 2006, p. 3).

Teachers' commitment, professional identity and promotional prospects are also influenced by prior theorizing about their being identifiable ages and stages in a teaching career. Sikes (1985) considered that as teachers move into their early 30s, it is often a watershed period for male teachers as there is an increasing requirement to map out a life plan. This frequently involves applying for promoted (HoD) teaching positions with 'successful' teachers being those who by their early 40s have achieved this ambition. For male teachers, in particular, prospects of promotion deteriorate after age 40 with careers tending to plateau. This can be a traumatic period as there is a need for self reappraisal and an increasing acceptance of their own mortality. By their mid 50s teachers are likely to be a familiar presence in schools having by now taught successive generations of families. There is also by now a considerable age gap between young and old teachers. This can be difficult for older teachers to accept as they are often 'critical of what they perceive to be the low professional standards of the new generation of teachers' (Sikes, 1985, p. 55) and also as there is an

impetus in some quarters for the targeted promotion of younger teachers in order to improve relationships with pupils (Garner, 2009). Analysing the aptness of these descriptions appears pertinent, for as long ago as the mid 1980s, Sikes (1985, p. 57) recommended that further research specifically in physical education would be merited as such teachers ‘are an obvious example ... (where) ... the nature of their subject tends to make them acutely aware that they are getting old’.

In Cohen’s (2009) study of veteran teachers, both teachers expressed frustration that their experience was not utilised more constructively when reviewing good teaching. Consequently, Cohen (2009) argues that school leaders should try to make schools more empowering and attractive work environments for veteran teachers, so that the benefits of their commitment, interest and insights into professional learning are valued. Armour (2006, p.203) argues that improving teachers’ career-long professional development should become a ‘compelling research agenda’, so pivotal is it to quality teaching. However, despite a general consensus about the merits of ongoing professional development how to nurture it is more problematic. The recent reliance on occasional school closure days where groups of teachers meet to respond to some new education innovation are generally considered remote and unsatisfactory in meeting teachers’ professional needs (Armour et al., 2010). By contrast, most teachers prefer a focus on collaborative working and pupil learning coupled with a supportive school environment where interest in professional development is sustained over time (Armour, 2006). Accordingly, in taking forward research on the social and policy contexts of teaching, this paper will specifically review issues connected with professional development as well as those previously mentioned on teacher identity and career stages.

Methodology

Introduction

Life history research has the capacity to move ‘between the changing biographical history of the person and the social history of his or her lifespan’ (Plummer, 2001, p. 40). However, it is also

an inexact method as one teacher's experiences are not necessarily representative of other teachers' experiences. Thus, 'life history studies can and often do have a sample of one' (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. xii). The research approach is worth persevering with however as it can yield informative insights into the critical moments that have defined teachers' careers and it also avoids the pitfalls of trying to draw generalisable findings from the ambiguities and contradictions which are necessarily part of teachers' everyday experiences.

The Scottish context

Over 95% of secondary schools are in the public sector. High school lasts for all pupils until 16 years old, with three fifths of pupils (60%) currently opting to attend school until 18 years old (Scottish Government, 2008). Most schools have relied on single subject HoD posts, a few additional HoDs who have a pastoral rather than teaching remit and a SMT consisting of Deputy Head Teachers and a Head Teacher for their management and leadership structure. In 2007, there were 1805 specialist teachers of physical education teaching in 378 state secondary schools; an average of 4.8 subject teachers per school. The average physical education teacher is 40 years old, slightly younger than the norm for all high school teachers of 43.5 years (Scottish Government, 2008). With reference to the decade by decade categorisation of teachers age used in national statistics, nearly a third of physical education teachers are in their 50s (32.6%) with a modest number remaining in post until over 60 years (1.0%). For male physical teachers in their 50s (n=291), just over a third (n=100) are in non promoted teaching posts. Therefore, on average just over a quarter of all high schools (26.5%) have a male non promoted physical education teacher of over 50 years in post (Scottish Government, 2008); a sizeable minority presence in the teaching force. Statistical analysis of teacher census figures does not enable further analysis. Thus, while it is recognised that some of the male non promoted teachers over age 50 could have decided never to have applied for a promoted post, been late entrants into teaching and/or joined the teaching force recently from another country, it does appear probable nevertheless that at least some (if not many)

of the 100 teachers in question have at various times been unsuccessful in achieving promotion to HoD level.

Procedural issues, the researchers' role and the school context

The main difficulty with the research approach adopted was in identifying veteran teachers who were male, over 50 years old, in a non-promoted teaching post and who had repeatedly and unsuccessfully applied for promoted teaching positions. These sampling arrangements were necessary in order to discount interviewees who might have applied for a few HoD posts before deciding that a non-promoted teaching role better suited their lifestyles and preferred career pathway. It also helped to discount the possible bias of geographical circumstance and employment mobility. Scotland occupies a third of the United Kingdom landmass but has less than 10% of the population. Therefore, in rural parts of Scotland there are few high schools and fewer promotion opportunities available relative to more urban areas, unless relocation is undertaken.

In making decisions about which teachers to approach my own professional background in physical education in Scotland (twenty years secondary school teaching experience followed by ten years as a lecturer in higher education) was helpful in identifying potential interviewees. Proceeding on this basis was considered preferable to circulating requests for interviewees through various educational reporting outlets; an approach which might have been ineffective and possibly insensitive given the aims of the research. Furthermore, in life history research, questions are never compartmentalised to the extent that the professional is separated from the personal (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Thus, the advantages of a degree of familiarity borne out of working on a sports coaching programme over fifteen years previously was used as the basis for contacting one teacher to discuss the research initiative. I was aware through informal networking that 'Jack' (pseudonym) was still teaching and from earlier conversations recall discussing career progression matters with him. In pursuing this approach it was considered that relationships were cordial enough to make an

approach feasible, yet not so close that it might make Jack uneasy about exercising his decision-making right to decline to participate. After making initial contact, a pre-interview meeting was arranged to outline in greater detail the interview focus which was planned. Agreement to participate was recorded and pertinent details about confidentiality and how interview transcripts could be checked for accuracy between interviews were set out in writing. This transparency process was designed to ensure that the protocols adopted met with the ethical procedures applicable within this version of life history research (Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

Jack is 57 years old and has spent his career teaching in one school in an urban area of ongoing social deprivation in west central Scotland. Jack is the longest serving teacher in the school. The local authority currently has the third highest pupil uptake for free school meals (17.4% viz. a national average of 12.9%) out of the thirty-two locally elected education authorities (Scottish Government, 2009). Scotland no longer completes national cross school comparisons of examination attainment, but when they most recently did in 1999 results indicated that 12% of pupils' gained three higher levels awards in the senior school years (16-18 years) compared with a national average of 20% (Scottish Executive, 1999).

The interviews were completed between September 2009 and May 2010. Interviews lasted for approximately 90 minutes and were built around a structure of key questions on the social and policy context of teaching. All interviews were taped and transcribed. During interviews, questions were asked in a neutral tone. This avoided overly predetermining responses and enabled Jack to move discussion away from the precision of the lead questions as he recalled his career experiences. Follow up subsidiary questions were used to confirm meaning and provide prompts for elaboration of answers. Adopting this procedure is consistent with the interview advice offered by Scott & Usher (1999, p. 113), who indicate that if the aim is to understand contexts better then 'the focus and frame are likely to be weaker'. The first interviewed focussed on acquiring background

contextual information on the main stages of Jack's teaching career, so that these could inform as necessary future interviews. Building on Sikes (1985) notion of there being identifiable career stages, interviews thereafter predominantly adopted a decade by decade focus, prior to a concluding interview where opportunities to review the overall areas of satisfaction and disappointment which have characterised a career in teaching was completed. Accordingly, the second and third interviews predominantly focused on the 1970s and so on across the decades. Across all interviews key features of professionalism (e.g. commitment, control, hardiness and challenge) permeated and informed analysis when discussing professional identity, age and stage of career and professional development. Lead questions on professional identity in its wider context focused on issues such as socio-economic circumstances and their impact upon school life with policy specific questions focusing on educational aims and their implications for school ethos and pedagogical practices. More personal questions on Jack's identity as a teacher focused on levels of motivation, commitment, resilience, coping strategies and any feelings of vulnerability there were during his career. Age and stage of career questions asked generally about the details of Jack's teaching role and responsibilities and more specifically on the nature and frequency of promotion applications and his reflections about the interview process. Questions on professional development enquired about levels of support over his career and the nature, type and amount of opportunities which were available.

Analysis and validity of data

In becoming familiar with the data, suspending one's own views enabled a recursive approach with interview explanations read and reread for accuracy of meaning as necessary. As such patterns and relationships relevant to the literature and the key features within the analytical framework for discussion (teachers identity, career stage and professional development) could be recognised, as well as noting contrasting and emerging issues as the series of interviews progressed (Lees & Fielding, 2007). Close listening ensured that occasions when words were repeated were

carefully noted as were phrases or explanations which were particularly emphasised. As analysis continued illustrative quotes and comments were identified and referenced against reporting on the wider social and policy context of teaching in Scotland over the last forty years (Hardy & Bryman, 2004). By repeatedly returning to earlier interviews, confirming opinions through further enquiry as well as responding to new issues which might be pertinent across one or more of the three key features was possible as the series of interviews progressed. Overall, deploying this approach ensured that the analytical focus was 'in tune with the data' (Dey, 1993, p. 64).

However, with such a detailed focus on one interviewee it is recognised that findings can only ever be a partial analysis of particular events and are not the 'methodological equivalent of the Holy Grail' (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.1). Accordingly, in order to avoid unnecessary contestation occurring, matters such as the outcomes of promotion interviews were not followed up with those responsible for conferring appointments, as it was not the purpose of the research to contest issues; rather the approach adopted attempted to better understand the influences, impressions and consequences of key moments on one teachers' professional life. For ease of understanding, in the following discussion direct quotes from Jack are placed in single quote marks and have the interview date alongside in brackets.

Discussion

The social and policy contexts of teaching

- ***Teacher identity***

When Jack's began teaching in 1974 there were more jobs than available teachers and consequently it was possible to negotiate which area and school you wished to join. Jack was moving to a new area in order to be beside the partner he had met at college. The school chosen was newly built and had excellent facilities. There were nine teachers in the physical education department. The school had 1600 pupils; a high number which reflected a period of relative economic prosperity in the area. Pupils absorbed teaching advice and participated willingly.

Discipline was firm with SMT taking an active role in these matters. Classes were single sex and set according to academic ability. Jack endorsed this approach, as the benefits of mixed ability teaching are a myth - 'we cannot all be similarly excellent' (24/9/09). The SMT held the physical education department in high regard and valued their contribution to whole school ethos. Teachers were autonomous in framing curriculum aims and were unencumbered by SMT scrutiny of plans. Extra curriculum provision was generously supported. Overall, the 1970s and early 1980s were a golden period, where Jack's stable identity as a physical education teacher and good relationships with pupils and SMT was helpful in developing a passion for teaching and the idea of teaching as a vocation.

A new HoD was appointed in the late 1970s; an older male teacher already teaching in the school when Jack arrived. During the following years the school role over the space of a few years halved and department contracted in size. By the mid 1980s there were only two male teachers and one female teacher in the department. This position remained unchanged for the next fifteen years. Jack did not apply for the in school HoD position as he had only been teaching for a few years and it 'came too soon' (19/10/09). The decline in school numbers reflected a shift in the fortunes of the area socio economically and in the fortunes of the school. Under new parents right of access arrangements other local schools were often considered better options. Behaviour and motivation tended to decline with many pupils having a plethora of social support needs. Teaching at this time was also beset by an acrimonious industrial dispute during which teachers voluntary contributions became part of a bargaining lever for achieving better pay and conditions of service. While Jack was generally sympathetic with the teachers' case it came at a cost to physical education as levels of out of school extra curriculum participation never recovered and it also took many years as well before SMT recognition of physical education begun to improve. Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, Jack's continued high level of intrinsic interest in teaching and the benefits of collegial

working arrangements endorse the broad and general findings into why many teachers persevere in teaching (Xin et al., 1999).

Jack's first HoD application took place in 1985 and was rather unusual in that three different HoD positions were filled following one round of interviews. Furthermore the positions available were in the three closest high schools to where Jack was residing. Thus, house moving or additional travel could be avoided if one of these positions could be secured. Jack considered that he was now adequately 'time served' (10/11/09) to apply for promotion. However, he had to wrestle and tease out certain issues with which he was uneasy. Jack was critical of how becoming a HoD was regarded as 'being the making of the man ...[and of the]... jostling for position' (10/11/09) which was beginning to take place among colleagues as they tried to increase their professional profile. Jack never really wholly identified with the idea of 'career as contest' (10/11/09) and valued more highly collaborative work arrangements. However, against this Jack could see the advantages of being responsible for the management and leadership of a department and the adverse possible consequences of working under others HoD leadership. The significance of the day is evident by noting that twenty-five years later the appointments confirmed on the day are still held by the same teachers. After the interview, very little feedback was offered; the occasion being treated 'as an interview not a learning process' (2/12/09). Jack's perception is that what he offered was a diagnostic analysis of the requirements needed to improve physical education in the respective schools and rather less which articulated with wider school agendas. This might have adversely influenced the interview panel consisting of: headteacher; local authority education managers and council members representing parents' organisations.

When asked specifically about the personal disappointment associated with not becoming a HoD, Jack commented 'that there was nothing underhand about the interview process' (2/12/09) and that ultimately the problem was that 'I was unable to convince the audience that my promotion

was a good idea' (2/12/09). There were in Jack's words 'likely to have been calls behind the scenes' but this was just 'something that happens' (2/12/09) when there is such an established model of school leadership in place. Furthermore, disappointment was not momentous enough to considering leaving teaching as fundamentally 'I always thought of myself as a teacher' (2/12/09), plus the responsibility requirements of now providing for a young family made it to radical an option to consider. There was no great sense of career stagnation either as relationships with the HoD continued to improve and this ensured that Jack's ideas for new teaching innovations were well received. Jack found solace in his teaching with the middle years of his career being quite empowering in terms of having control and influence over many aspects of teaching and learning at subject level. Tsui (2009) when discussing the distinctive qualities of veteran teachers notes the particular importance of engaging in experimenting with new ideas and immersing oneself in subject teaching as the hallmarks of developing expertise. Overall, Jack's professional life at this time reflects (Matti, 2002, p.72) analysis that high levels of commitment, control over teaching environments and of being comfortable with innovation challenges helped develop 'hardiness'. Jack, in these respects, recognized his good fortune in that atypically he had a high degree of settled professional control and influence, despite not occupying the type of hierarchical leadership position which is normally so heavily relied upon in Scotland.

When asked again about the sense of disappointment accompanying continued promotion rejection, Jack did not come across as apathetic. However there was a sense of partial bewilderment about the way careers developed for some teachers but not for others. This particularly applied to younger teachers who gained promotion after only a few years' teaching. Jack considered that such early moves for promotion were rather audacious and misguided, and broached what Ball (2003, p. 218) has referred to as the 'older ethics of professional judgement and co-operation'. In the late 1980s the pattern of applying for promotion, gaining an interview, reflecting on lack of success recurred as a further eight HoD applications came and went; all of which were for schools within an

hours travelling time of home as personal circumstances did influence the geographical areas within which Jack and his family considered a school move feasible. Nevertheless, by residing in a sprawling urban area there was the potential for numerous promotion applications which did not require relocation. At this stage, Jack was still persuaded that applying for HoD positions was a good idea despite the disappointment of ongoing rejection and some slight unease about the adequacies of the hierarchical model of leadership with its creation of the 'specialist opportunities which arise' for those becoming HoDs relative to the lesser 'prestige which the unpromoted teacher enjoys' (Humes, 1986, p. 22).

In general, Jack reflections tend not to mirror Kelchtermans (1996) findings re public failure, teaching vulnerability and conformity with the status quo. For example, during the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s, Jack's self-start skills were pivotal in developing a local authority sport coaching scheme. The challenges of developing the scheme 'became my department' (16/12/09) due to the amount of time and effort it required to train staff, organise pupils and manage money. Completing this remit became an important part of Jack's identity and relieved much of the tension of interview rejection, even if the skills and abilities required for coordinating a coaching scheme for up to five hundred pupils was insufficient to enhance promotion prospects. The rewards of the coaching scheme were in creating and sustaining new sporting opportunities and in gaining the interest and professional recognition of peers. During a period of local government reorganisation in the early 1990s funding was withdrawn and the coaching scheme had difficulty continuing on a pupil additional payment basis and finished in 1995. One beneficial legacy of the scheme was the good relationships Jack continued to have with many ex coaching scheme pupils who often progressed into sport related careers. Seeing the benefits of good quality work helped sustain Jack's teaching and made it easier to 'keep going back' (16/12/09).

Throughout the 1990s agendas geared towards increasing the role of schools in connecting with communities better was seen as an overly interfering form of social engineering. Jack was thus not inclined towards applying for any of the additional pastoral HoD positions being offered as he did not support increased teaching time being directed towards personal and social education. Jack considered the 1990s as a time when the basic integrity of being a teacher was being challenged ‘as no-one seemed to be standing up for the benefits of maintaining standards ... [and that] ... ‘teachers were becoming involved in groups where they talked there way around problems or a task but not through it’ (19/1/10). Jack’s experiences chime with Day & Smethem (2009) comment that a defining feature of this period was government beliefs that fragmentation in society (especially in areas of social deprivation) could be lessened by improving the emphasis on social values in schooling, even if this focus proved destabilising for teachers in the short term. By the mid 1990s Jack was becoming stale and concerned that he was putting in much more that he was getting back. Satisfaction levels in teaching were at a low-ebb for a while. However, Jack managed to ‘catch himself mentally’ (19/1/10) and avoid adopting a minimalist approach to teaching which he recognised he could not cope with for another fifteen years as ‘time passes quicker when you are doing something’ (19/1/10).

By the mid 1990s the school only had 600 pupils and by 2009 the school closed completely. A new school was opened as a result of two high schools merging. Jack, begun his teaching career in a new school building and was still in post when the same building was declared unfit for purpose thirty-five years later. O’Sullivan (2006) notes that veteran teachers in Ireland displayed impressive resilience in coping with poor facilities during the early part of their careers. Jack’s resilience appears equally impressive through coping with progressively deteriorating facilities and by sustaining a commitment for teaching during the later half of his career, especially after his involvement in a coaching scheme was unable to continue. Additionally, a new headteacher arrived in 2000 and proved difficult to work with relative to the three previous headteachers. Jack’s sense is

that continued local authority requests for his specialist coaching skills to be deployed outwith the school upset the headteacher as she had little control over this arrangement.

By this time Jack was considering it better, and to some extent more straightforward, to focus on subject teaching alone rather than on trying to gain promotion as well, especially given the tension there was with the new headteacher. Accordingly, what defines Jack's teaching this century is a focus on seeking pedagogical improvements in response to observing lower levels of pupil fitness and interest; in effect, of making productive teaching gains against a backdrop of diminishing returns and limited professional recognition at headteacher level. Nevertheless, Jack remained committed in his teaching to:

... challenging the idea that making progress with the learning process is the same thing or as good as making real learning gains in ability or understanding.

I think if you go down that road to far, you begin to accept mediocrity and I'm not for doing that (7/2/10).

Jack's career reflects many of the key features of Cohen's (2009) descriptions of expert veteran teaching; specifically, the ability to derive 'pleasure and satisfaction from teaching *despite* (originally emphasis retained) the students' and the recognition that their identity of themselves as a teacher means that they are 'ill-suited to any other work except the kind that affords them a stage; a position, front and center, where they call the shots and write the scripts' (Cohen, 2009, p. 487).

- ***Career stages***

Jack in his early years of teaching had no career plan - 'I just wanted to be a PE teacher' (19/10/09). However, in accord with Sikes (1985) theorizing about how the early 30s are a watershed age in many male teachers lives, Jack became aware at this time of the need to consider teaching in clearer career terms. Jack's inability to secure promotion in the mid 1980s (most notably on the interview day when three HoD appointments were confirmed) highlighted the relative lack of

promotion opportunities which were likely to become available unless relocation was considered. Again, there was a growing realisation that promotion was unlikely in Jack's early 40s, and that he had probably reached a career plateau and that making the best of his current teaching remit would need to suffice. A further four school based HoD promotion opportunities came and went in the early and mid 1990s. The most vividly recalled was for a HoD post in a neighbouring local authority. There was particular disappointment associated with the application, as the school was in an area of relative economic prosperity. There was a sense that it would have offered a fresh start in a different type of school after twenty years in the same school. The failure to achieve this particular promotion was quite traumatic and was accompanied by some dismay as well that once again he had 'chosen to put himself forward' (16/12/09). despite the disappointment that rejection would bring. Other more far reaching options such as moving into sports coaching or relocating might have been considered if still single, but the value of having a 'job for life' (16/12/09) was too much of a good thing to place in jeopardy when supporting a family. During promotion interviews in the 1990s, Jack tried to an extent to recognise the need to provide more rounded whole-school type answers; in a sense to provide answers which enabled panel members to 'tick off their checklist' (16/12/09). However, he found the notion of providing set answers rather difficult and disingenuous when engagement with more substantive issues appeared necessary. Penney & Evans (1999) make the point that physical education can suffer through being considered low in educational status but high in marketable value; a situation which, if true, makes it even less likely than normal to appoint HoDs who would challenge rather than comply with existing SMT value preferences.

By the turn of the century was a familiar presence in school with the trend continuing of enjoying the control and relative autonomy of subject teaching, but not off being a teacher more generally. At this time the HoD became progressively unwell and in an unusual circumstance, could only straightforwardly gain an early retirement package if the SMT were assured that there would be applicants for the vacant HoD post (such was the general decline in school circumstance at the

time). In order to ensure this occurred, Jack agreed to apply. However, in the event others applied and one of them secured the position. Jack expected such an outcome and thus there was no undue disappointment about the decision. Accordingly, there was no loss of motivation or 'bitter disengagement with teaching' (Templin et al., 1991, p. 150), no intention of just 'seeing out time' (8/2/10) just a return to focussing on those elements of a professional life which were most satisfying. In fact, helping the new HoD gain an appreciation and understanding of how to make the most pedagogically of new curriculum arrangements brought some late satisfaction to Jack's career in ways which are contrary to Sikes's (1985) notion that it can be difficult for older teachers to adapt to younger teachers holding promoted teaching positions. Such notions of 'principled professionalism' (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 131) reflect Day & Smethem's (2009, p. 152) expectation that for some teachers 'hope, a sense of agency, and a belief that they could continue to make a positive contribution to the learning and achievement of pupils' sustains their teaching.

- ***Professional development***

When Jack began teaching there were very few induction arrangements for new teachers. There was however a strong sense of subject cohesion in the local area, which was aided by being part of a large department and by there being three full time local authority subject advisors. Furthermore, even though there was a marked reduction in teacher volunteerism for leading extra curricular activity from the mid 1980s onwards, there continued to be a broad minded view taken about professional development by the local authority. For example, staff could pursue a variety of outdoor pursuit experiences and qualifications without a precise functional connection being drawn as to how this would link to day-to-day teaching. Such provision enhanced staff loyalty and was a major influence on Jack remaining in teaching within the same local authority. This view of professional development lasted until the mid 1990s when there was a further period of local authority reorganisation. Jack thereafter taught in a local authority with only five other secondary schools in contrast with the 15 secondary schools there were previously. Thus, the infrastructure for

providing a greater range of professional development opportunities and for sharing ideas across larger networks of colleagues began to diminish. Furthermore, there was far less professional development provided which was based on developing me as a person and which took place within a generally supportive school environment (Armour, 2006). Most in-service days were now for reviewing central government informed curriculum arrangements. In general, Jack's later career became a relatively isolated experience with little of the vibrancy of his early career where there was regular professional association meetings to share ideas. Effectively during this period Jack had to sustain his interest in teaching through networking with relatively small audiences; a situation which chimes with Cohen's (2009) concerns about how more needs to be done to make schools empowering and attractive for veteran teachers.

In this respect, Jack's career has highlighted some of the limitations of the predominantly subject-based HoD model of school leadership, as it is recalled as being rather inflexible and disengaging for those who were not HoDs. Jack's greatest involvement was with the relatively familiar challenges of subject based developments and coaching initiatives which mostly took place across the local authority. A more demanding requirement for a greater in-school contribution might have led to Jack's ideas and experiences in teaching being used more constructively in ways which benefited the school more widely and which challenged Jack to come out of his subject comfort zone and to try and appreciate whole school agendas more. For as Lennon (2008, p. 387) notes in a Scottish context a 'teacher's concept of school as the principal professional community to which they belong – rather than the department or subject – is crucial, because it is the best guarantee of a collegiate commitment to the development of the whole child'. Jack's later career in this respect was rather isolated and disconnected as his educational focus was predominantly on (and allowed to be on) subject specific matters relative to those teachers and school leaders who were more committed to 'the current vogue for integrated children's services' (Doherty & McMahon, 2007, p. 262).

Conclusion

The research approach adopted considers that evidence from interview-based analysis of teachers' lives has the potential to bring about school improvement and educational reform, and should therefore be of interest to those with responsibilities for educational programmes in schools and local authorities. Reviewed in this way, research findings can move from being merely descriptive to informative in wider analytical terms when reviewing some of the influences of social and policy changes in education over recent decades. So, what are the main themes and findings which emerge from analysis of Jack's career? With regard to Jack's strong identity with teaching, findings in this paper endorse Cohen's (2009, p. 488) view that for some veteran teachers 'their idiosyncratic needs and personalities just naturally mesh with the culture of teaching'. Jack's hardiness was in certain ways multi-faceted. He was able to cope with frequent interview rejection, the demands of sustaining his interest in teaching in a challenging school environment as well as recognising the family need for stability. Jack's career also links to many aspects of the age and stage portrayals described by Sikes (1985) in ways which contain the capacity to 'provide analytical order to our thoughts' (Templin, et al., 1991, p. 154) and the basis upon which to complete a more detailed review of the complexities associated with individual teachers' careers. Jack was dismayed by continuing reductions in the quality of professional development, the lessening of communities of local physical educationalists working and meeting together and the relative lack of collaborative managerial cultures in schools for investigating teaching and learning issues. These limitations left him feeling rather isolated and undervalued during the latter half of his career. As Jack described it 'other teachers move on, but I've tried to reinvent myself within the same school'. Atypically, in Jack's career some of the more frequent sources of frustration e.g. rates of pay, workload pressures and poor pupil behaviour never caused particularly concern with Jack continuing to find solace in subject teaching and through his strong identity of himself as a teacher.

Adding impetus to reviews of how in the future teachers such as Jack can have their professional needs and contribution more fully recognised, is noting that changed school management arrangements mean that there will be many more teachers like Jack in years to come. Anderson & Nixon (2010) outline how Scottish schools are committed to introducing a faculty management system based on clusters of subject groupings; a flatter leadership arrangement which will result in there being far fewer teachers in middle management (HoD) positions. So, how in these circumstances will the motivation and interest of teachers such as Jack be retained? The evidence from the latter third of Jack's career is that his interest in subject teaching was allowed to dominate his professional development efforts relative to a being more actively encouraged to become more involved in whole school initiatives. Greater leadership sensitivity might have helped Jack to reflect more upon the empowering and contributory benefits of working more collegially with colleagues in ways which might have helped reduce any lasting vulnerabilities associated with his unsuccessful promotion applications. In this respect, analysis of Jack's career is helpful in highlighting how school leadership approaches in secondary schools will need to carefully develop research informed strategies in years to come which focus on the ongoing professional development of teachers whose entire careers are as unprompted teachers.

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